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The Sidney Olympics and NBC's Bonanza

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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Like all of you, I have been worrying a great deal lately about the future of Olympic Television Sponsorship. You can appreciate my relief this week when Dick Ebersol, The Sun King of NBC Sports, announced that his network was about to negotiate a new sponsorship arrangement with John Hancock, the company not the man, for the Sydney games.

Sounding oddly like J.P. Morgan responding to President Theodore Roosevelt, Ebersol, speaking of Hancock CEO David D'Alessandro, said, "His TV sales people and our TV advertising people will sit down in the next two weeks and work out arrangements..."

John Hancock had withdrawn its \$50M Olympic sponsorship arrangements after the Salt Lake City Scandal broke. Now apparently undeterred by continuing rumblings out of Sydney the people at John Hancock are ready to re-enlist. In a historical irony John Hancock, the namesake of this insurance giant, was himself one of the shadiest business operators of the American Revolutionary period.

D'Alessandro was pleased with the reforms instituted by the IOC, and was able to set aside all the personal attacks that Ebersol had leveled against the Hancock CEO. In a unique bit of reasoning D'Alessandro concluded that by bringing in people like George Mitchell and Henry Kissinger the IOC was "no longer the kind of insular club it was..." So we have yet another measure of diversity in the modern world.

The clincher in the entire process is that new sponsorship contracts will include a "morals clause." This will allow sponsors to terminate their deals with the IOC if another ethics scandal should surface. With the radical reforms instituted by the IOC such an eventuality seems out of the question.

Thinking about this ethic cleansing by NBC, the IOC, and its sponsors I immediately asked myself if the process could work in reverse. If, for example, John Hancock was to cancel the insurance policies of AIDS victims, could NBC then get out of its contract with the insurance giant? If Mr. D'Alessandro was found to be using company funds to rent three floors of a hotel in Sydney to house some of the

thousands of homeless prostitutes who are flooding into Australia for the games, would that constitute grounds for NBC to withdraw the contract?

Such a possibility seems remote, but one never knows.

For those who still want to join this new wave of ethical purity it is not too late. Ebersol announced that NBC had already sold \$750M worth of ads for the Sydney games but there is still more to sell. This figure, which exceeds the Atlanta \$670M, is a record for what Ebersol terms, "an offshore Olympics." Contemplate that image!

Meanwhile back in Sydney, or is it offshore in Sydney, Dick Pound was chastising the Sydney Organizing Committee (SOCOG) for badmouthing what Pound characterized as the most successful marketing program in the history of the games. SOCOG has been describing its marketing program as a failure and Mr. Pound, the marketing wizard of the IOC, is dumbfounded by this bit of Aussie pessimism. He wondered aloud whether his brand of Canadian "English is intelligible to the local flora and fauna."

Pound said that after watching SOCOG operate "we knew it was nuts." These verbal assaults are better than the Bush-McCain invective being hurled in South Carolina in the past week.

Michael Knight, one of the SOCOG leaders, was not impressed by Pound's comments. It is not clear whether Knight is "flora" or "fauna," but it is clear that he is not enamored of Mr. Pound.

All of this bickering coming out of Sydney should not be regarded as a problem. Sponsors should in fact be encouraged by the fact that Mr. Pound is out there on the frontlines protecting the Olympic Image. It proves once again that the eminent Mr. Pound is just the kind of watchdog that is needed in a time of crisis.

Pound knows the difference between pounds and dollars, surplus and deficit, principal and interest. What he may not know is the difference between principal and principle.

Better have another look at that "morals clause" in the new sponsorship contract.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you
that you don't need to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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